

Governor's Bill 839
Testimony in support of the Office of the Child Advocate
From Susan Lloyd Yolen, Vice President, Public Affairs & Communication,
Planned Parenthood of Connecticut, Inc.
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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Bill 839, and provisions included within the legislation that would eliminate the independent oversight and accountability for state funded services to children currently provided by the Office of the Child Advocate. Planned Parenthood of Connecticut is the state's largest provider of family planning and reproductive health care, caring for nearly 65,000 patients annually at 18 health centers statewide.

The interests of the Child Advocate and our own have been mirrored over the years. Very often, our organization is confronted with the need to provide reproductive health care to young people who are in crisis: at home, at school or in an institutional residence. Our staff is careful to follow state law addressing the gray areas between the need to involve state agencies in such situations, and the need for confidentiality that the patient may require. For instance, we do care for young women who seek our services after having been the victims of dating violence or partner abuse, and it is a relief to know that the Office of the Child Advocate has this issue front and center on its list of priorities. PPC also regularly offers care to young people in group homes and other residential programs. Again, as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect, we know that the OCA is a resource we can turn to should we become concerned about any young person's safety within such a program or institution.

Advocate Milstein and her staff have an exceptional record of integrity and effectiveness. While our organization completely understands the unique fiscal challenges of the current moment in our history, elimination of the independent Office of the Child Advocate would, we fear, compromise the safety of Connecticut's most vulnerable population. Those most helped by OCA are those least likely to be here to testify in its support. We ask you to stand up for this important watchdog agency, and protect its independent role going forward. Thank you.